

Fragments of History, Silhouettes of Resurgence: Student Radicalism in the Early Years of the Marcos Dictatorship

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Abstract

Using some of the few recovered and accessible primary documents written by cadres of the Communist Party of the Philippines, this essay attempts to trace the process by which the Party revived its most dynamic “sector” during the early years of the Marcos dictatorship. It shows how these cadres introduced and implemented the strategy of “legal struggle” to create an array of seemingly apolitical student associations which soon became the backbone of the brief resurgence of radical politics in schools and campuses. The strategy however was not without its problems, the foremost being its coming into conflict with the preference of the CPP leadership for rural-based, armed struggle of which the urban mass movements, including those by the students, were only to play secondary supportive roles.

Keywords: protests, Communist Party of the Philippines, Marcos dictatorship, revolutionary underground

On September 21, 1972, shortly after President Ferdinand Marcos issued his declaration to put the Philippine under martial law, units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) swept through major urban centers and arrested thousands. Among those detained were anti-Marcos politicians, journalists, priests, labor leaders, and businessmen. Students, however, comprised the largest number of detainees, many being identified with radical national democratic organizations which were tagged as fronts of the fledgling “re-established” Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). No sooner had Marcos consolidated his dictatorship when challenges began to emerge. In southern Mindanao, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) launched a rebellion against the dictatorship, and in Manila, anti-Marcos politicians mounted a series of constitutional challenges to martial law. A year after the declaration, the first signs of urban resistance appeared as well—beginning in the church and in the schools, and spreading quickly to the factories and the urban poor communities. By 1978, street protests had returned to Manila.

This essay reconstructs the story of the recovery of the student opposition to martial

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law.¹⁾ During the first five years of martial law, the CPP's central committee and main bulk of cadres comprised mainly students from the top universities of the country. Trained and inspired by a university lecturer and poet, Jose Ma. Sison, they took charge in building the urban underground networks and the first units of the New People's Army (NPA), the CPP's armed guerrilla force. Sison recalls that as a result of the student protests of the 1970–72 period, “a proliferation of mass organizations . . . yielded a large number of militant mass activists and party cadres who volunteered to join the party and the NPA in the countryside” [Sison and Werning 1989: 63] (underscoring mine).²⁾ Another Filipino Marxist, Francisco Nemenzo, concurred describing how the “bourgeois education of some NPA soldiers enabled them to play a role that the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (HMB) never performed. NPA units were welcomed by the peasants for their new agricultural skills, herbal medicine, acupuncture, makeshift irrigation, and so forth. More effective than the local governments and field agencies of national minorities, the NPA administered justice, maintained peace and order, organized small economic projects, ran adult education classes and, in the stable guerilla fronts, even implemented a ‘revolutionary land reform program.’” Nemenzo, added that “NPA thus projected a more positive image; they were not seen as parasites who fed on the meager products of the farmers” [Nemenzo 1984: 84].

These observations however have not been backed by a more detailed political history. There are pieces of stories of student movement revival, but hardly is there any academic research that details and analyzes these stories in depth.³⁾ This lacuna could be traced to the fact that communist and ex-communists tend to write little about their experiences, preferring to move on with their lives and forget their political past. Moreover, the tales of political revival that have been told are often overshadowed by narratives of political celebration or strategic priorities. Studies on the anti-Marcos opposition, for example, generally focus on the People Power uprising of February 1986 at the main artery, Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA). Discussions center on dynamics of this “EDSA revolution” (as it is referred to nowadays) and its legacy (good and bad), while those that write about the CPP center on problems of ideology and strategy and

1) The Filipino Left uses the word “sector” to refer to various groups in society. Sometimes it replaces “class” terms, but sometimes is used to conveniently disguise (albeit badly) class-based perspectives, especially in the legal political terrain. As far as I know, no one has studied the political etymology of this term. I employ the term in this paper largely because of its common use during the martial law period.

2) A stirring fictional account of the human cost of student involvement in the fledgling communist movement is Firmeza [1991].

3) These stories are found mainly in journalists' accounts of the CPP, notably Jones [1989], and Chapman [1987]. Early works on the martial law labor movement tend to also remain broad (see Torres-Yu [1983]). Lately, biographies of radicals who died have contributed substantively to efforts of writing the Left's history from below (see Maramba [1997] and *Pulang Hamtik* [1997]).

general sketches of party history.⁴⁾ Political and activist writings likewise legitimize actors identified with certain events and justify the centrality of specific “forms of struggle”—specifically the primacy of armed resistance.⁵⁾

To understand EDSA or indeed the current plight of the CPP, however, requires a return to the past to look at how it all began. This essay is an attempt to outline the history of that past by looking at how students developed an effective response to martial law. Much of the data it will be using comes from experiences of student radicals from the University of the Philippines (UP). The reason for this is simple: only UP has made available its collection of documents on the Philippine Left. We do not know if similar literature is available in the libraries of other universities, much less in the National Archives.⁶⁾ This limitation notwithstanding, I think it is still possible to tell the story of the revival of student radicalism in the first years of martial law even if the available evidence is still incomplete. Here I rely on the arguments of historian Carol Ginzburg who suggests that single events or pieces of documents and even the story of one person cannot be simply dismissed as limited, too narrow, or not substantive enough. For they actually yield what he calls “small insights” that in turn present “clues” about the larger historical frame [Ginzburg 1992: 115]. The French historian Emil Guillaumin was also able to describe rural life in France under the *Ancien Regime* of Louis XVI through the life story of Etienne Bertin, a sharecropper. He was able to not only give rural poverty under Louis XVI a face but also how the lives of peasants like Bertin were often disconnected and/or different from larger events that affected Europe in the 1860s and 1870s [Guillaumin 1983]. One should therefore treat this essay like a detective work at its first stage, where differing fragments of events are being pieced together to form an initial silhouette of student politics under martial law. For purposes of this inquiry I will center on the document Hinggil sa Legal na Pakikibaka (On the Legal Struggle, henceforth abbreviated to Hinggil), written by one of the top ideologues of the Samahang Demokratikong Kabataan (Association of Democratic Youth, or SDK), Antonio Hilario, to provide activists with a manual that analyzed their situation and propose a guide to effectively responding to the authoritarian state. The article also represented an attempt to give serious attention to an urban strategy that CPP leaders had ignored because of the priority they gave to the armed struggle in the countryside.

4) See, among others, Thompson [1995], Porter [1987]; Third World Studies Center [1983] and Weekly [1996].

5) For example, Liwanag (Jose Ma. Sison) [1992]; *Muog: Ang Naratibo ng Kanayunan sa Matagalang Digmaang Bayan sa Pilipinas* [1998]; Bolasco [1994: 142–159]; Tupaz [1991: 3–5]; Ciria Cruz [1992: 5–15]; Serrano [1993: 4–5]; and, Raquiza [1994: 3–21].

6) See *Philippine Radical Papers in the University of the Philippines Diliman Main Library: A Subject Index* [1998]. A microfilm collection of the papers is also available for use or purchase.

I Recovery

Martial law caught student radicals by surprise. Despite warnings of impending “fascist rule,” few expected it to happen so soon or so swiftly. Martial law also exposed the Left’s weaknesses. While pre-martial law slogans like “Digmaang Bayan, Sagot sa Martial Law” [People’s War is the Answer to Martial Law] made good propaganda in the streets, they were unrealistic as weapons of mobilization and re-organization.⁷⁾ Many accepted that retreat to the countryside and clandestine work was the best responses to the dictatorship, but not all were ready to commit themselves to armed struggle or go “full-time.” Neither were the guerrilla fronts and urban communities under radical control ready to receive them.⁸⁾ Moreover, active pursuit by the military further reinforced an general sense of fear and confusion. Journalist Gregg Jones (who was given unusual access inside the Party in the 1980s) aptly describes this state of confusion:

The sudden transition to the underground took a heavy toll on young activists ill-prepared for the chronic pressures of life on the run. Some who managed to win immediate assignments to the countryside decided they were not cut out for the work of a rural revolutionary, and they quit or asked to return to Manila. . . . Others were not as lucky. . . . Inexperienced and recklessly brave, many were killed. [Jones 1989: 105]

Other regions were equally affected by the swiftness of martial law. In Mindanao, CPP cadres who managed to establish an island-wide network of legal organizations by 1971 admitted they too were unprepared for martial law.

Para sa paghahanda tungo sa susunod na yugto naging pangunahing kahinaan ng rehiyon ang kakulangan nito sa pagsapul sa nalalapit nang pagiral ng Batas Militar. Hindi nakagawa ng partikular na hakbangin ang KR para sa kagyat na paghahanda sa pagpataw ng Batas Militar at sa lantarang panunupil ng pasistang rehimen. Dagdag pa naging kahinaan din ng rehiyon ang malayong pagkakalat ng mga kagawad ng kalihiman kung kayat walang nakatayong sentro ng pamunuan sa nalalapit na pangkagipitang kalagayan. [Mindanao Commission n.d.: 9]

7) See, for example, Sandigang Makabansa, “The Situation is Critical—What must be Done?” manifesto, September 19, 1972, and “When Trickery and deception fails, there can be no other recourse but brute force,” in *Philippine Radical Papers* [Box 16/10. 18, Reel 18, and Box 11/02. 02, Reel 07, respectively].

8) According to one informant, the party “hierarchy was practically out of touch, and basically couldn’t issue any directives at all, at least to the Manila-Rizal organization, which was practically autonomous.” Interview with B, former member, Manila-Rizal regional committee of the party, July 28, 2000.

[The region's main weakness was failing to anticipate martial law. The regional committee was unable to make specific steps to prepare our forces to the open suppression of a fascist regime. The committee's ability to organize was also hampered by the dispersion of its members throughout the island. As such there was no real center of leadership by the time martial law was imposed.]

The effects of this unpreparedness were strongly felt in the schools. Universities were closed until the end of 1972 and were re-opened under tight military surveillance. Education authorities made sure that once common political activities and organizations were banned from the campuses [Philippines, Department of Education 1972 (November)].⁹⁾ The overall impact of these measures appeared serious. At UP, the student newspaper, the *Philippine Collegian*, reported that as many as 3,000 students did not report back to school upon the resumption of classes.¹⁰⁾ Those who returned were threatened with arrests and spied upon in their classes. Many who were identified with the student Left were promptly picked up and sent to the major detention centers. Martial law had clearly altered the political terrain for the student Left.

These drawbacks, however, did not prove fatal. Despite wide-ranging restrictions and arrests, student radicals were able to re-establish a skeleton dissident network connecting a number of major schools in Manila. Pre-martial law student affiliations were dissolved. Better coordinated, they held "silent marches" protesting martial law and enjoining students to join the resistance.¹¹⁾ An underground "edition" of the *Collegian* described one such march at UP:

The march which was held in protest against the suppression of basic rights and freedoms of the student sector and the Filipino people as a whole caught the campus *kempetai* unguarded. The mass of students began marching at the second floor of the [Arts and Sciences] building at about five minutes before ten. Numbering to only 50 students at the beginning of the march,

9) The guidelines directed "security measures" to be set up in schools, which included the expulsion of students and faculty members identified with "subversive elements." They also placed the burden on school administrators to prevent "any acts of violence or any violation of existing laws as well as Proclamation 1081 [the martial law decree] and other orders, decrees and instructions issued as a consequence thereof." Failure to implement these guidelines and "prevent subversive activities or acts of violence [in their premises could lead to] the immediate closure of their schools."

10) The *Philippine Collegian* [February 1, 1973] (henceforth *Collegian*).

11) This was not a Manila exclusive. In Mindanao, Party historians wrote that despite the disorganization caused by martial law, "may mga natitirang mga militante at aktibong elemento ng masang aktibista sa kalunsuran na nagsasagawa ng pasulpot-sulpot na propaganda laban sa batas militar. Patulong nilang ginawa ang pagdidikit at pagpipinta ng mga islogan sa iba't-ibang lugar ng kalunsuran" [there were intermittent attempts by urban militants and activists to wage propaganda attacks on martial law in the form of posting slogans in various parts of towns and cities] [Mindanao Commission n.d.: 13].

the group swelled to 150 to 200 upon reaching the stairs leading to the third floor. More students joined the march at the fourth floor. . . . There was distribution of manifestoes lambasting the fake referendum. Manifestoes about the anti-student, anti-democratic characteristics of the present *Philippine Collegian* were also distributed. . . . There was also shouting of slogans which was received with warmth by the masses of students. . . . Slogans such as “Tutulan ang panloloko ng diktadurang US-Marcos sa referendum!” “Ipaglaban ang ating mga demokrati-kong karapatan!” “Ibagsak ang diktadurang Estados Unidos-Marcos!” reverberated in the fourth floor of the AS building as the militant students continued marching.¹²⁾

Another newsletter, *Dissent*, reported that similar marches were staged by students in other universities, panicking university authorities and the military into making more random arrests.¹³⁾

But it soon became clear that these marches—facsimiles of pre-martial law protest actions—were becoming costly. The *kempetai*-like arrests angered more students, but they took a toll on the activists and cadres who led the protests.¹⁴⁾ This prompted internal discussions about the continuing effectiveness of party strategies and tactics. Some persisted that they were worth continuing as martial law was merely “a paper tiger,” while others demanded a general retreat and a long period of quiet reconsolidation of forces. A few even proposed engaging in “counter-terrorism.”¹⁵⁾ As the arrests in the schools continued, however, those advocating a rethinking of organizational strategy to ensure the long-term rebuilding of the radical student movement slowly prevailed. The first indication of a shift was illustrated by a manifesto written by a group calling itself the “Diliman Community against the US-Marcos Dictatorship.” Apart from the now-standard brief criticism of the dictatorship, the manifesto also exhorted the UP community “to organize faculty members, students, friends and relatives into groups of 5 or 4 to join the just struggle against the Marcos fascist dictatorship . . . [to solicit] financial aid to support the underground movement and [at] all times [to] try to arouse [sic] the political consciousness of everyone you know to mobilize them for the resistance.”¹⁶⁾

12) “AS students stage protest march anew,” *Rebel Collegian* [1973: 4]. The *Rebel Collegian* was printed to act as foil to the official student newspaper that was then under conservative control.

13) *Dissent*, Special Release No. 4, UP Revolutionary Committee, March 30 [1973: 4]. See also Nemenzo [1989: 9].

14) In Mindanao, the problems were similar. While the counter-propaganda against the regime was laudatory, party historians also admitted that they had limited impact because of “mahinang pampulitikang pundasyon ng mga komiteng panlungsod” [the weak political foundations of the city committees]. The end results were the “maagang pagkalantad at pagkapinsala sa kanila” [premature exposure and arrests of comrades] [Mindanao Commission n.d.: 13].

15) See footnote 17).

16) “Diliman Community against the U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship” [January 29, 1973], mimeographed.

Unlike other manifestoes which simply exhorted students to protest martial law or join the resistance, this particular document hinted at more tangible organizational options. The appeal to form small support groups and engage in propaganda and education among “everyone you know” so as to “mobilize them for the resistance” meant a shift from the regular marches to slow, painstaking organizing work. The aim was no longer to bring a sympathizer or new recruit to the silent marches, only to have her/him arrested. Rather, the education, mobilization, and recruitment of students were to be directed toward a long-term purpose: the development of a support base. However, the manifesto’s proposal of a support base consisting of many small groups still did not explain how the student opposition could be revived. What was needed was a thorough evaluation of the status of the radical forces, an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of martial law, and a realistic way in which radicals could resurrect their political presence in the schools and universities. The document “Hinggil sa Legal na Pakikibaka” would try to fill gaps left by the Diliman Community manifesto.

II “Legal Struggle”

Hinggil appeared in the last months of 1973. It was written at a time when the CPP leadership was “practically out of touch and basically couldn’t issue any directives at all, at least to the Manila-Rizal organization, which was practically autonomous.”¹⁷⁾ Its author’s intent was to address the single biggest challenge facing the UP underground at that time—“ang unawain at angkupan ang bagong kalagayan dulot ng batas militar, at gawin ito sa pinakamadaling panahon” [to understand and deal with the new situation created by martial law, and to do this in the swiftest manner possible]. Noting the confusion within the ranks of radicals, Hinggil proposed “the strategy of legal struggle” as the “wastong anyo ng pakikibaka at organisasyon sa wastong panahon” [the appropriate form of struggle and organization at this given period of time]. What did Hinggil mean by “legal struggle”? It referred simply to the use of whatever action or organization allowed and/or tolerated by the dictatorship to recover from the immediate impact of martial law and revive the student opposition. Hinggil noted that despite its authoritarian character, martial law still allowed certain kinds of organizations and activities, provided they were apolitical or, if political, sanctioned by Marcos and the military. Radicals needed to exploit these opportunities and turn these seemingly apolitical or legitimizing activities and organizations into weapons of the revolution.

Legal struggle was argued to be especially appropriate for “the masses” in the urban

17) Hinggil was written by Antonio Hilario, a leading ideologue of the SDK. It was written “without any party ok,” and “the informant was not even sure if Hilario had already joined the CPP by then.” Interview with B., former member, Manila-Rizal regional committee of the Party, July 28, 2000.

centers. As Hinggil explained it:

Legal ang pangunahing anyo ng pakikibaka ngayon sa kalunsuran. Ito ay batay sa simpleng katotohanang ang higit na nakararaming masa—ang masang siyang nagdudulot ng suportang kailangang-kailangan ng rebolusyon, ang masang hinahangad tulungan ang mga rebolusyonaryo—ay matatagpuan hindi sa ilegal kundi sa legal na aktibidad o pagkilos. [Hilario c.1973: 13]
[Legal struggle is the main form of struggle in the cities. This is based on the simple fact that the majority of the masses—those who could provide the much-needed support to the revolution, those who would be eager to help the revolutionaries—could be found not in the illegal but in legal activities and endeavors.]

Invoking Lenin's and Mao's notion of the masses being divided into "advanced, middle and backward elements," Hinggil further argued that the majority would be found mainly among the middle and the backward elements.¹⁸⁾ This majority could be effectively reached only through legal struggle—the kind of politics that they knew more about.

Legal na pakikibaka ang tanging paraan upang maabot ng mga rebolusyonaryo ang higit na nakararaming panggitna at nahuhuling seksyon ng masa upang makapagbigay sila ng praktikal na rebolusyonaryong pamumuno sa mga pakikibakang inilulunsad ng higit na nakararaming masa. [*ibid.*: 15]

[Legal struggle is the only means by which revolutionaries can reach the largest number of middle and backward sections of the masses and provide them with the practical revolutionary leadership that they will need in their struggles.]

Hinggil stressed at the outset that legal struggle was in no way a questioning of the CPP's overall strategy of protracted people's war. It insisted on the primacy of the rural resistance and the secondary role of cities in the general strategy.¹⁹⁾ Yet, it also maintained that cities had unique features that determined how the revolution should be waged within the urban areas and in a condition where the Left was on the defensive against a powerful state. The limits on political maneuverability imposed by the state made it imperative to take advantage of whatever openings were available; at that time, those openings were in the legal sphere. Legal struggle was a strategy to reanimate mass support for the revolution, work through the limitations imposed by the dictatorship, and slowly push for greater democratic space. As that space grew, so would the ability of

18) By virtue of their "advanced" politics, the advanced sections of the masses were most likely the ones already participating in the underground. They also tend to be a smaller group.

19) "Ang kalunsuran ay pumapangalawang kahalagahan sa buong estratehiya ng rebolusyong Pilipino" [Hilario c.1973: 2].

urban revolutionaries to support the rural resistance with arms, people, funds, and other resources.

Involvement in legal struggle also meant a new attitude towards reformist politics. Hinggil rationalized that exploiting reformist politics was necessary under authoritarian rule. Eschewing debate over reformism as a deviation from political practice, it simply pointed out that this was the way the “middle and backward” elements of the mass initially encountered politics. There was no reason to fear that the mass would remain reformist. The polarized situation created by martial law made alienation from reformist politics inevitable and the possibility of people accepting the revolution would become stronger. Radicals must be ready to tap this alienation and shift mass sympathy and support to the national democratic struggle. Being at the right place at the right time would ensure that their leadership would be acknowledged.

Hindi tayo dapat matakot makibaka para sa mga reporma. Ang pakikibaka—kahit na para sa reporma—ay siyang kaparaanan upang makilala ng masa ang kanilang sarili, ang kanilang mga pinuno, at ng estado. Ang tungkulin natin ay padaliin ang ganitong pagkatuto ng masa mula sa sarili nilang karanasan. [*ibid.*: 18]

[We should not be worried that part of our strategy is to fight for reforms. The struggle—even the reformist ones—is a means by which the masses can come to know their capacity, recognize their leaders, and understand state power. Our responsibility is to hasten this political education of the masses based on their experiences.]

To pursue legal struggle, radicals were urged to create “new types of organizations” appropriate for their potential constituents and supporters. What were needed were

mga bagong tipong unyon ng mga manggagawa, organisasyong pangkomunidad, organisasyong pangkampus, samahan ng mga opisina, atbp. Ang ibig nating tukuyin sa “bagong tipong” ito ay pinagpatnubayan ang mga organisasyong ito ng mga pambansang demokratikong grupo. [*ibid.*: 15]

[new types of workers' unions, community organizations, campus groups, office associations, etc. These “new types” of organizations will in turn be guided by national democratic cells.]

This did not mean, however, that radicals had to start from scratch, for the “new types of organizations” included what Hinggil called “traditional associations” referring here to academic clubs, fraternities, newspaper associations, and “US-style clubs” like the Jaycees and the Lions International. What would transform them into “new types of organizations” would be their slow shift towards open anti-dictatorship politics and the influence or leadership that radicals were expected to provide [*ibid.*: 11]. Moreover, there was no need for radicals to reorient themselves for “these new types of organizations.” Before martial law, some activists and cadres had already begun operating in traditional

associations and were untouched by military repression. It was now a question of sharing these experiences of the many who were accustomed to the open politics of the pre-martial law period or who were honing their skills for clandestine work.²⁰⁾

The document insisted that popular interest and sentiment were the determining factor of any legal struggle mobilization. For leftists to become leaders of these organizations, they had to identify closely with their immediate concerns and interests.

Ang sentral na tungkulin natin ngayon ay ibagsak ang diktadurang US-Marcos upang kamtin ang pambansang demokratikong kalayaan at demokrasya. Ngunit ang tungkuling ito ay hindi matutupad, gaano man kalakas natin itong isigaw o ilang beses man itong isulat sa pader kung hindi natin makukuha ang taos-pusong pagsuporta ng masa, kung hindi natin sila makumbinsi na “kinakatawan natin ang kanilang kapakanan, na ang mga buhay natin ay mahigpit na kaugnay ng sa kanila.” At maisasagawa lamang ito kung tutulungan natin silang lutasin ang kanilang mga kagyat na suliranin, kung mapatunayan natin ang ating praktikal na pamumuno sa kanilang araw-araw na buhay. Sabi nga ng mga Pilipino, “pag ika’y nagparaan, pararaanin ka rin.” Kapag nagsisimula tayo sa aktuwal na kalagayan, at kumikilos bilang mga tunay na kinatawan ng interes ng masa, walang dudang iginaganti sa atin ng masa ang kanilang matatag na suporta. [*ibid.*: 17]

[Our principal concern at the moment is the overthrow of the US-Marcos dictatorship to attain national freedom and democracy. But we cannot accomplish this goal, no matter how loud we shout our slogans or how often we paint these on walls, if we do not gain the wholehearted support of the masses, if we fail to convince them that “we represent their interests, that our lives are inextricably linked to theirs.” In addition, we can only do this if we assist them in their efforts to resolve their immediate problems, if we can prove to them our practical leadership in their daily lives. We Filipinos often say “if you let others pass through, they too will do the same to you.” If we start from their real situation and act accordingly as representatives of their interests, there is no doubt that the masses will reciprocate by giving us their unyielding support.]

Leadership in the Leninist sense was thus not to be taken for granted nor was it inherent. Cadres and activists had to show that they took the masses’ interests to heart, participating in their daily struggles, sharing their experiences, and identifying with their sentiments. Only when they had done so, demonstrating wholehearted commit-

20) “Natulungan din tayo ng katotohanan na bago pa man ideklara ang batas militar, kumikilos na ang iilang kasama (ngunit ito’y iilan din) sa mga organisasyong pangkampus, sa mga di-pambansang demokratikong union, sa mga kapisanan sa mga komunidad. Ito’y nagsilbi bilang paghahanda sa panunupil, at hindi lubos-lubos na naapektuhan ang takbo ng gawain sa mga ito. Sa katunayan, ang mga ito ngayon ang siyang nagsisilbing pinakasulong na mga yunit ng buong kilusang panlungsod at siyang nagbabahagi ng kanilang karanasan na dapat sundin ng iba” [Hilario c.1973: 15].

ment to their constituents, could they claim political leadership and turn these organizations into weapons of the revolution. Hinggil was not only recalling Lenin's pleas in *Leftwing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*; it was also reminding fellow activists of the continuing relevance of Mao's "mass line."²¹ The document did not question the existence of an underground network operating beneath these layers of "new types of organizations." As mentioned above, it insisted on the guidance of "mga pambansang demokratikong grupo," while noting that the underground's continued growth was contingent on its legal counterpart's development.

However, despite its acknowledgement of the secondary role of cities in the protracted people's war, Hinggil was actually proposing fundamental revisions to the general strategy outlined by CPP founder Jose Ma. Sison. The first had to do with the nature of "legal struggle" itself. In their "rectification campaign," Sison and the first generation of leaders constantly underscored the revolution's armed and covert nature [Guerrero 1971: 281–282]. Legal struggle was associated with parliamentarism, a "rightwing deviation" that spelled disaster for the CPP's forerunner, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), and held back the development of moderate groups. Hinggil disagreed, using the sacrosanct "interest of the masses" criterion to justify the merits of legal struggle. It also invoked history as a validation, asserting that legal struggle may not alter its basic form—fighting the state in the open through pressure politics and mass mobilization—but that its meaning changed throughout Philippine political history, depending on how the state responded to the Left. Argued Hinggil:

Ang partikular na nilalaman o kahulugan ng legal na pakikibaka ay nakabatay sa aktuwal na kundisyon sa kasaysayan. Halimbawa, bago ang 1931, ang PKP ay masasabing legal; hindi ito 100% sinupil hanggang 1931. Ang mga pambansang demokratikong organisasyon at ang mga anti-pasistang organisasyon, bago ideklara ang batas military, ay pawang legal. Ngunit ito'y nagbago ng panunupil. . . . Sa mga kalunsuran, ang katayuan ng lahat ng anyo ng pakikibaka at organisasyon (ang legalidad o ilegalidad ng mga ito) ay pangunahing itinakda ng reaksyonaryong kapangyarihang pampulitika ng estado. [*ibid.*: 9]

[The particular substance and meaning of the legal struggle are based on actual historical conditions. For example, before 1931, the PKP was actually a legal organization; it was not

21) The writers translated a section from Lenin's essay: "Kung gusto mong tulungan 'ang masa' at makuha ang pagsang-ayon at suporta ng 'masa', hindi ka dapat matakot sa kahirapan, hindi ka dapat matakot sa mga pambubuwisit, panlalansi, mga insulto at pag-uusig mula sa panig ng 'mga pinuno'... kung kailangang kailangan kumilos ka saanman matatagpuan ang masa. Kailangang batakin mo ang lahat ng pagpapakasakit, pangibabawan ang pinakamalaking balakid upang makapaglunsad ng adhitasyon at propaganda nang sistematiko, matama, walang puknat at matiyaga, lalu't higit sa mga institusyon, kapisanan, at samahan—maging ang mga pinakareaksyonaryo—kung saan matatagpuan ang proletaryo at mala-proletaryong masa" [Hilario c.1973: 13]. The Source is Lenin [1965: 13].

suppressed totally until 1931. Before martial law was declared, the national democratic organizations and anti-fascist groups were all legal. This changed with the repression. . . . In the cities, the status of all forms of struggle and organization (i. e., their legality or illegality) is determined by the reactionary political power of the state.]

By understanding the nature of legal struggle as historically contingent, Hinggil was arguing that radicals must be aware that strategy was variable and constantly open to change. If revolutionaries kept alert to this, they would be able to anticipate the state's attacks and adjust adequately. This seemingly commonsensical idea, however, flew in the face of the party's orthodox view of revolutionary strategy: an urban resistance comprising mainly "legal struggle" of ever-changing meaning undercut the CPP's belief in the universal application of Maoist strategy and tactics in the Philippines. To admit that legal struggle assumed different forms at different times was to be open to the possibility that the larger revolutionary framework was also alterable. Hinggil's value here extended beyond its urban realm into the very ethos of the CPP's general strategy itself.

Furthermore, Hinggil also expanded the meaning of the urban resistance beyond that of being a mere support role for the countryside. While acknowledging the connection between urban and rural areas, Hinggil argued subtly that the cities should be more than resource bases for the countryside, training cadres and accumulating material for the guerrilla fronts. On the one hand, not all of the revolution's potential constituents could become guerrillas or function as collection agents of money, arms, and medicine. On the other hand, urban centers were rich with mobilization potential on their own account. Students and other sectors could be galvanized to fight for "basic human rights" and the restoration of democratic rights. These issues might transform some into guerrillas or full-time cadres; they might lead others to push for change within the cities themselves.

The urban struggle, therefore, had the potential of becoming another front, in which the CPP could undermine the dictatorship through pressure politics. This could be done alongside the rural resistance, assuming that NPA successes transformed guerrilla fronts into stable guerrilla bases. Alternatively, it could develop autonomously of the countryside, opening "democratic spaces" in the cities through constant mass mobilization and unrelenting propaganda and education. Here, I think, is the second significance of Hinggil as a revolutionary text. In putting forward the strategy of legal struggle, it broadened the role of the urban resistance to one in which students, workers, urban poor communities, and other sectors would be mobilized to create and defend a "democratic space." Thus, as early as 1974, this notion was placed on the discussion table by radicals; it did not originate in the early 1980s as some activists and scholars of that period claim [Abinales 1993: 31]. The ancestry of the term "democratic space" is radical, and CPP cadres writing documents like Hinggil were its earliest articulators.

The prominence given to reformist politics represented another modification of the general strategy. Giving reformism serious consideration was a risky proposal, since the origins of CPP-influenced student radicalism were based partly on the “rectification” of past errors, a strict adherence to the political line of Mao Tse Tung Thought, and an unceasing criticism of rival moderate and radical groups whose political lines were deemed “reactionary” or “revisionist.” The Left’s weakened position, however, left it with few options. It could not persist with the pre-martial law habit of belligerently asserting its “correct line of march” against other forces. To do so would jeopardize possibilities of a broad coalition—no matter how tactical—with other anti-Marcos groups. More importantly, it would isolate the revolutionaries from the masses who were, in the first instance, still drawn to legal struggle.

That said, it is also important to note that these subtle reconsiderations did not mean Hinggil was written purposely to challenge the CPP’s instructions. The SDK cadres were clearly inspired by a CPP central committee directive which, in Nemenzo’s words,

stressed the need for clandestine members to maintain their legal cover and persevere in the military arena. This prudent policy enabled the party cells in Manila and other places to operate with minimum disruption. The CPP’s tactical objective in the early days of martial law was to keep its mass followers active without unduly taxing their courage. Party cadres in the universities, for example, devised subtle forms of protest to feel out the boundaries of governmental tolerance. But these seemingly puny gestures also preserved a sense of solidarity while the forces of martial law were still on the offensive. [Nemenzo 1984: 88]

Working within this framework, Hinggil reiterated the preliminary nature of its proposals and underscored the need for cadres and activists to accumulate the necessary practical experiences to enrich further discussion of the urban strategy. No strategy was clear-cut, no tactic was eternal. The enriching character of political praxis would ensure that they would constantly change.

Did Hinggil’s arguments receive a fair hearing from among the ranks? We are not sure, although there is indirect proof that some of its tactics were applied at least at UP. A manifesto released by the so-called Student Revolutionary Movement of UP, for example, closed its brief overview of the first year of martial law by calling on activists to “use all channels opened by the state to advance our demands and to convince the majority of the people of the futility of depending on the state to work for its welfare.” The manifesto added that these “legal channels also serve to educate the masses of the futility of parliamentary struggle and the correctness of the armed struggle.”²²⁾ Soon after, there was a noticeable shift in student engagement with univer-

22) Student Revolutionary Movement of UP, “September 21: National Day of Mourning for the ↗

sity and state authorities away from the “silent marches” to more deliberate and careful staging of petitions, “calls,” and appeals for “students’ rights and welfare.” Activists also began forming or reviving “traditional” student associations like academic clubs and fraternities that became strong advocates for the full restoration of official student councils (which university authorities and state officials regarded as a threat to academic stability), the loosening of restrictions on the *Collegian*, and the right of students to free expression. To project strength, these organizations—with members averaging between 25 and 50—formed alliances. By late 1974, university officials were forced to grant some concessions to the students, which led them to push for more reforms. An historical sketch written for election campaign purposes by publicists of the present left-wing student coalition Sandigan para sa Mag-aaral at Sambayanan describes these early years.

In the second semester of the same school year [early 1973], academic organizations gained relatively greater freedom of movement through coordination with academic departments. The new style of work encouraged other organizations to regroup. Fraternities and sororities, varsitarian and some social service groups were again reactivated, although their activities were confined to their respective members only. But the efforts towards establishing broader unity were immediately evident when the heads of existing organizations created the League of Student Leaders (LSL) in 1973. It was not an alliance of existing organizations; it served as coordinating body to work out common demands.²³⁾ (underscoring mine).

Perhaps a better way of ascertaining whether Hinggil made an impact is to examine more closely how particular party activists and student organizations operated during this period.

III The Praxis of Legal Struggle

Jones describes a cadre reviving political organizing at UP after his release from detention in these terms:

Omy, who had been arrested shortly after martial law was declared, and released in early 1974, returned to UP to resume Party organizing work, only to discover that student activism was dead. Even intellectuals were afraid to voice dissent to the martial law regime. Undaunted, Omy joined innocuous campus organizations and created new groups that could become fronts for clandestine communist activities. He joined a popular fraternity and became president six

↙ Death of Democracy,” *Rebel Collegian* [September 18, 1973].

23) “The History of the *Sandigan para sa Mag-aaral at Sambayanan*,” mimeographed, *Philippine Radical Papers* [Box 16/09.05, Reel 08, 1].

months later. He organized a history club and immediately began sizing up the radical potential of students who joined. Within a few months, he was forming secret Marxist cells within the organizations he had created or joined. [Jones 1989: 109–110]

Omy's entry points were "innocuous campus organizations," the very type of associations that Hinggil intimated would be the fitting initial base for the legal struggle. Where no such organizations existed, Omy helped found new ones like the history club. By becoming president of the fraternity and a top leader of the history club, Omy appeared to have immersed himself successfully among his constituents. It did not take long before secret national democratic cells were established and new activists recruited. Other cadres would replicate what Omy did with these two organizations.

And were these associations successful in combining their traditional manifestation (a fraternity and an academic organization—two of the most popular associations on any campus) with their political intentions? In the case of the history club, it does appear so. The UP *Philippine Radical Papers* collection includes a September 1976 issue of a newsletter of the Lipunang Pangkasaysayan (LIKAS), one of two history clubs during that period and a leading group in leftwing student politics at UP [Lipunang Pangkasaysayan 1976].²⁴⁾ The issue is remarkable for the way it connected university and national issues, the responsibilities of being scholars and members of society.

Page one contained the editorial, various news items, and the association's logo, which consisted of three characters from a presumably pre-colonial Filipino alphabet. Below the logo was apparently the club's theme: "Itaguyod ang Kamalayang Pangkasaysayan" [Promote historical consciousness]. The news items included a story about an academic workshop on the social responsibility of the Filipino scholar, a summary of a club-sponsored symposium on the International Monetary Fund (whose discussant was the prominent human rights defender, former senator Jose W. Diokno), and the report of a successful "sale-raffle" to boost club funds.

The inside pages had a note on successful protests by student dormitory councils that prevented university authorities from imposing additional regulations and an update on the latest efforts by UP student leaders to strengthen their alliances. There was also a report on new coalitions being formed, this time by editors of the various "campus newsletters." One page reprinted three poems by Mao Tse Tung, and the remaining pages were devoted to a book review of a work on "ethno-history," a critique of a referendum to be conducted by the dictatorship, and a sports fest held by club members to strengthen ties with each other. Finally, the editorial portrayed LIKAS as an academic club struggling with organizational and financial matters while in pursuit of a "pro-people" history. A breakdown of the editorial's issues shows the political education process of potential constituents.

24) On a short history of the organization see Ledesma *et al.* [2008: 180–183].

The editorial began with a reminder to members that LIKAS just went through a “makabuluhang” [meaningful] semester. Why was it meaningful? For one, members not only reaffirmed the club’s “tradisyon” of promoting historical consciousness; they were also able to resolve some organizational problems that hampered the club [“mga suliran-ing bumibigat nito”]. With the wrongs corrected, the club was ready to return to its work of actively promoting historical consciousness. At the forefront were two issues that would test the mettle of its “tradisyon”: the upcoming conference of the International Monetary Fund in Manila and the October 16, 1976 referendum called by the Marcos dictatorship purportedly to feel the public pulse on the continuation of martial law. These issues would have a direct effect on the club’s rejuvenation; by acting on them, internal unity would be strengthened. These three issues then—the IMF, the referendum and LIKAS’s internal recovery—were inter-related. They were “tatlong bagay na sa unang wari ay hiwa-hiwalay, subalit sa katotohanan ay magkakaugnay” [three issues which, initially may appear distinct from each other, but in actuality, are linked to each other].

The editorial enjoined members to remain true to LIKAS’s commitment to history by getting involved in the struggle against the IMF and the referendum. It implored them not to be content with solving past organizational problems, but to use their revived unity to push for meaningful social change. It was quite emphatic: “kalabisang pang sabihin na hindi tayo tumitigil dito, na patuloy ang ating pag-aadhika, walang-hinto sa pagkakamit ng pagbabago sa Lipunang Pilipino” [We must underscore that the struggle will not stop here, that we will continue to adhere to our objective of fighting at all times for change in Philippine society]. The subsequent paragraphs were devoted to detailing the problems caused by the IMF and exposing the farcical nature of the referendum. The editorial ended with this rallying call to protest, reminding readers that LIKAS’s march was part of the larger march of a people’s history:

Kapag ganito, hindi dapat magsawalang-kibo ang mga organisasyong tulad natin. Ang ating layunin ay tungo sa isang makabuluhang pagbabagong patutunayang progresibo na kabuuang pagsulong ng kasaysayan. Ang paglalantad at pagtutol ay hakbang tungo rito. [Lipunang Pangkasaysayan 1976: 4]

[Organizations like ours should not be impervious to these conditions. Our goal is to aspire for meaningful social change that shows the overall progressive march of history. To expose and to oppose is to take the first step in that direction].

Here was the classic application of Hinggil’s strategy of legal struggle. As an academic club, LIKAS was expected to commit itself to academic pursuits, in this case history (thus the symposia, the book reviews, and even the poems of Mao). Yet its concept of history was activist-oriented. It not only promoted history, it also practiced it; it tried to understand the past and also used it to make history in the present. Likewise,

historical consciousness allowed one to see the relationship of things and issues. Internal club problems were not issues in themselves; they were linked with “larger” social issues, at that time an imperialist one (the IMF) and an authoritarian one (the referendum). LIKAS members, all potential activists and recruits to the radical opposition, were being “trained” to search for these connections — a major step in their politicization process.

Unfortunately, this is the only student newsletter that the UP *Philippine Radical Papers* collection was able to preserve. We therefore have no way of knowing whether other campus newsletters explained issues the way LIKAS did. The creation of student alliances encompassing LIKAS (and possibly Omy’s fraternity as well) strongly imply, however, that such was the case and that radicals succeeded in circulating their view of issues. Less than a year after the editorial, in the first student elections authorized by UP authorities to form a consultative body to recommend guidelines on the restoration of elective student councils, radical-influenced alliances won handily against their conservative and Marcos-supported rivals.²⁵⁾

Omy did not last stay long with LIKAS and UP. After finishing and spending a couple of semesters teaching, he went underground and became a member of the Party’s Manila-Rizal regional committee along with another LIKAS alumnus who went by the alias “Nognog.” Two other LIKAS alumni were promoted to Party’s united front body, the National Democratic Front (NDF), another two were promoted to the Party’s National Youth Bureau (one of them was later on reassigned to a regional committee in northern Philippines), and three joined staff work in the Manila regional committee as well as the CPP’s research support unit. This is a significant percentage of cadres contributed to the cause given that LIKAS averaged one twenty-four members per year.²⁶⁾

IV Shifts

Universities like UP were not the only sites of legal struggle. As signs of renewed political activity became visible in urban poor communities and among the industrial

25) “The History of the *Sandigan Para sa Mag-aaral at Sambayanan*” *Rebel Collegian* [December 4, 1975: 1] and, “Sa Ikauunlad ng Bayan, Isip ang Kailangan: No Tayo sa Plebisito,” *Philippine Radical Papers* [Box 06/05.01, Reel 05].

26) This information is based on my personal knowledge of the organization’s history, having been president of LIKAS during the late 1970s and early 1980s. All, save two of these cadres, left the CPP after the internal splits in 1986. Omy became a politician and later on set up his own evangelical church. His comrade in the Manila-Regional committee quit the Party and opened up a music lounge. One member who joined the NDF became the chief propagandist of the current president of the Republic, while the alumna who became part of the Youth Bureau opted out of radical politics and is now running a thriving small business south of Manila. The ones who stayed loyal to the Party were the LIKAS alumna who was sent to the northern Philippines, and the other NDF leader who now helps run a solidarity network for the revolution in Canada. There has been no update on the rest.

working classes, the party “regained its footing by championing ‘genuine trade unionism’” [Franco 1997: 204]. Party recruits from the religious sector also helped to activate groups like the Association for Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP) and to organize Justice and Peace Commissions and the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines [Youngblood 1990: 84–85, 157–171]. Aware that the dictatorship often hesitated when going against nuns and priests, party cadres encouraged them to play major roles in the human rights struggle [Franco 1997: 183].

The “big break” for the CPP’s urban organization came in October 1975, when 5,000 workers at the La Tondeña Corporation distillery struck in protest against poor working conditions and a management plan to lay off workers. The La Tondeña strike caught the CPP by surprise. According to Franco, the central committee hesitated to support the strikers, initially fearing “the possible negative consequences of an open, full-blown strike for the distillery workers, the fledgling labor movement and the ‘entire urban revolutionary movement.’” But failing “to shake the workers’ resolve, the CPP eventually did endorse the strike, providing behind-the-scenes tactical advise and logistical support” [*ibid.*: 205]. A few days after the strike was launched, nuns and priests, urban poor, and student groups joined the strikers in solidarity. While the strike was quickly repressed, La Tondeña became the “unang putok” [first spark] that broke open the “authoritarian wall of silence.” Soon other unions followed—in defiance of a presidential decree banning all kinds of strikes—with the number of workers involved reaching as high as 40,000 in 1976 alone [*ibid.*: 207].²⁷⁾ A year later, La Tondeña had clearly paved the way for the beginnings of a “multi-sectoral” effort to push the democratic space further. Protest actions, notably “indoor rallies” were being staged in venues that were mainly protected by the Church. These were then sometimes followed by more daring open displays of protests.²⁸⁾ By 1977, the spirit of protest had spread in the urban poor communities, the most notable of which was the protest of dockhands in a community north of Manila against a government plan to displace them with a mechanized fish docking system, purportedly to relieve urban congestion.²⁹⁾

Student involvement with the La Tondeña protest was limited as the radicals were still in the midst of rebuilding. New leaders of the student alliances joined the strikes, together with the first batch of activists recruited under the framework of Hinggil. When the military began arresting the strikers, some of these leaders were detained. Their

27) See also “Workers strike movement surges anew in Metro Manila,” *Ang Bayan* [September 15, 1977: 5–7].

28) See also “Revolutionary mass movement developing rapidly in Manila-Rizal,” *Ang Bayan* [December 21, 1976: 2–4].

29) “Alyansa ng Maynila at Karatig-Pook laban sa Demolisyon at Presidential Decree 814,” mimeographed, 1976; and Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Batilyo Cargo Handling Services, Inc., and Samahang Pangnayon, “The Batilyo Issue,” mimeographed, *Philippine Radical Papers* [Box 01/13.01, Reel 2 and Box 15/34.01, Reel 08, respectively].

arrests became a test case to determine the extent of the success of legal struggle in the universities; those who were still free led the first open school protest at UP in January 1976.³⁰⁾ Security forces dispersed the protesters and arrested more leaders, but like the La Tondeña strike, this small march of a few hundred students broke the wall of silence in the schools. Henceforth, activists became more audacious in testing the political waters, starting with participation in the “indoor rallies” of 1976.³¹⁾

Patient organizing that either followed closely or were similar to the Hinggil recommendations, finally yielded fruit in 1977. When UP authorities implemented a 1974 proposal raising tuition fees, a move carried out by other schools as well, students responded by spontaneously boycotting their classes.³²⁾ This first major mass action inside the university since the declaration of martial law surprised party leaders, but they were able to regain their composure and lead. Caught between the impulse to protect university autonomy and pressure from the military to enter campus to disperse the boycotting students, university authorities compromised with the students. News of UP's success created a rippling effect in other schools which were soon hit by student boycotts. At the end of the second week of the first school semester, over 200,000 students in metropolitan Manila alone had joined the protests.³³⁾

With party cadres acting as facilitators, the spontaneous student leaderships that emerged from the protests were brought together to form the coalition *Alyansa laban sa Pagtaas ng Tuition Fee*. With the *Alyansa* keeping up the pressure, the dictatorship relented and ordered a rollback of all tuition fees to their pre-1977 original levels.³⁴⁾ The student movement had won its first national victory under martial law.³⁵⁾ The CPP's youth and student bureau interpreted this as an indication that students were ready for more explicit anti-state issues. After a series of follow-up campaigns, *Alyansa* leaders upped the ante and called for a general student mobilization to join a “multi-sectoral rally” protesting the anniversary of martial law.³⁶⁾ This demonstration — which was held on one of Manila's busiest streets (Avenida Rizal), drew 20,000 participants and was

30) *Philippine Daily Express*, January 6, 1976.

31) University of the Philippines (Diliman) Committee on Student Affairs, “A Clarification on what really happened on January 23, 1976,” mimeographed, 3 pp. *Philippine Radical Papers* [Box 17/46.01, Reel 9].

32) *Rebel Collegian* [1973: 4].

33) “Resurgent student movement sweeps colleges, universities,” *Ang Bayan* [July 15, 1977: 1-3; “200,000 students in 10 schools rally to resurgent protest movement,” *Ang Bayan* [July 31, 1977: 5-6].

34) “Militant student protest movement forces Marcos to take a step backward,” *Ang Bayan* [August 15, 1977: 4].

35) University Alliance, “The Significance of the Boycotts and Marches,” mimeographed, 1977, *Philippine Radical Papers* [Box 17/35.03, Reel 09].

36) “Take a Giant Step towards Freedom!”; and “Pahayag para sa Kalayaan, Katarungan at Dignidad ng Tao,” *Philippine Radical Papers* [Box 11/01.08, Reel 07, and Box 11/05.09, Reel 06, respectively].

brutally dispersed by the police. The figure is politically significant because it was the first time such large numbers were mobilized in an openly anti-fascist protest. It was, however, a let-down for student radicals, as student participation was nowhere near the 200,000 who had joined the tuition fee protests.

By the end of 1977, even the tuition fee boycotts waned as students considered the rollback a victory. Radical attempts to “deepen” the struggle had limited success, and while protests continued well into 1979, these were not as massive as the year before.³⁷⁾ Nevertheless, the hundreds of new recruits from the tuition fee struggle still proved a windfall for the fledgling student movement. As a result of more students recruited into the underground, the party declared the formal resurrection of the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) in its new role as the sole representative of the “youth and students sector” in the national democratic revolution. Writing a message of inspiration from his jail cell, KM and CPP chairman Sison predicted the onset of “repeated gigantic street demonstrations, each of which will be directly participated in by hundreds of thousands of marching workers and youths.”³⁸⁾

The party later approved a plan to form a national student association. Guidelines were issued to cadres and activists to set up special coordinating groups of three to five students who then would fan out to other schools and lay the groundwork for a chapter of this planned national student center [Ecumenical Writing Group 1982: 127–128]. Specially targeted were schools where student protests were spontaneous and the party had yet to establish a presence. After a few weeks of quiet but determined pursuit, these coordinating cells were able to bring student leaders from 24 schools and universities in Manila together in a general meeting at UP’s Asian Labor Education Center. On September 11, 1977, the National League of Filipino Students (NLFS) was formally established. In its declaration of principles, its first set of officers vowed to “steer” the organization “towards the promotion of our nationalist heritage, the growth of Filipino consciousness, the protection of our economic patrimony [and] the assertion of our democratic rights and civil liberties” [National League of Filipino Students 1977]. Echoes of the LIKAS editorial rang through this declaration of principle, now addressed to a membership far larger than that of an academic club. The student radical opposition had come full circle.

V Echoes of Hinggil

Did Hinggil’s ideas spread beyond the university? Here the evidence in our possession is

37) “Students, teachers boycott classes to assert their democratic rights,” *Ang Bayan* [January 31, 1979: 5–6].

38) “Persevere in revolutionary struggle, Sison urges *Kabataang Makabayan*,” *Ang Bayan* [September 15, 1977: 9].

still circumstantial and indirect. What was sure, however, was that the SDK cadres most likely got a fair hearing from the party's Manila-Rizal regional committee in its implementing its "tactical slogan" of "Alisin and Batas Militar! Magpatawag ng isang pambansa, demokratiko at anti-pasistang halalan!" [Down with martial law! Call for a national, democratic and anti-fascist general elections!] A Manila-Rizal document justified what eventually was criticized by the national leadership as a "rightist deviation" this way:

Una, lumahok sa legal na pakikibaka, magbuo ng mga legal na organisasyon ng masa — upang maugnayan ang masa, makalapit sa masa ng hindi nahahalata ng kaaway, upang mabigyan ng mga legal na daluyan ang rebolusyonaryong propaganda at ilegal na gawain; pangalawa, maglunsad ng mga legal na pangmasang pakikibaka — upang sa pamamagitan ng mga ito, matukoy ang mga militanteng pangmasang lider na magiging target ng ating lihim na rebolusyonaryong pagkilos, pandain pa ang mga lider na ito upang makapaglunsad ng mas marami pang pangmasang pakikibaka na makapagpapasulpot ng mas marami pang sulong na elemento mula sa masa. Sa ganitong paraan napakikinabangan at nakakasangkapan ang legal na anyo ng pakikibaka para sa pagsasagawa ng lihim na rebolusyonaryong edukasyon at propaganda, at pagbubuo ng mga rebolusyonaryong grupong ubod [KT-MR 1975: 7].

[First, we must join the legal struggle, first and foremost, forming legal organizations of the masses which, by linking with them and being close to them without the enemy finding out, will provide the legal conduit for our revolutionary propaganda and illegal work. Second, we must launch legal mass struggles that can produce legal mass leaders whom we can recruit to the underground revolutionary movement and then be deployed to lead more mass actions which, in turn, will develop more new leaders among the advance elements of the masses. Our underground education and propaganda will benefit immensely from these legal forms of struggle. These will likewise enable us to create more revolutionary cells.]

One also definitely hears echoes of Hinggil in the explanation given by the committee's former secretary to scholar Kathleen Weekley:

For the past two years there had been a "real ebb" in the urban mass movement and cadres were asking themselves "what is the form [of struggle] and slogan that can enliven [it] again... that can unite as many sectors of the population [as possible] and make an assault on the legal hold of Marcos?" The plan was "to come up with a parallel campaign" to that of the bourgeois opposition, and eventually to join them "in a broader... anti-fascist legal front." The KR-MR [regional committee of Manila-Rizal] "had no illusion" of gaining power in Manila; we could only win power through a people's war, that premise was never challenged by [our] proposal. The object of the campaign was to "divide Marcos [from] other reactionaries," and in the process to spread the national democratic message further and perhaps to dictate the "anti-fascist agenda." [Weekly 1996: 139-140].

The regional committee's haste in bringing about a "revolutionary situation" differed from Hinggil's idea of a painstaking and careful revival process, but its attitude toward utilizing reformist politics was clearly similar.

Quite notably, two of those in the Manila leadership who pushed strongly for the legal struggle were Omy and his fellow LIKAS alumni. They argued passionately against a directive from the Central Committee ordering Manila-Rizal to withdraw from an electoral alliance with non-communist forces and anti-Marcos politicians, contending that through "legal" tactics like elections would enable the Party "to expand its organized bases and transform them into a huge mass protest against the Marcos dictatorship [and] unite large segments of the population and the opposition ... against Marcos' manipulation of the ... electoral returns" [Caouette 2004: 233–234]. This rift reflected a more fundamental difference in perspectives towards the urban legal struggle. This was a problem that was never resolved and would have an effect on the CPP's crisis in the 1980s [*ibid.*: 241–242].

The "theory of legal struggle" likewise found resonance in the attempts of other organizations of the Party to break out of the constraints imposed by martial law. In the southern island of Mindanao, the Party leadership painfully realized that too much focus in building the NPA would have tragic effects if this was not backed up by meticulous and creative establishment of an underground network in the towns and the cities. A reconstituted regional committee reoriented its "white area" work to concentrate on the legal struggle, and the results were quite dramatic. The shift, according to the committee, brought about a series of

mapanlikhang mga paraan ng paggamit at pagbubuo ng iba't ibang legal na pamamaraan ng pagkilos. Naging pangunahing daluyan ito sa ating gawaing pag-oorganisa sa iba't ibang sektor ng kalunsuran at sa kanayunan labas at loob ng ating mga larangang gerilya. Naging daluyan din ito sa pagpapataas ng antas ng ating legal na pakikibaka at kilusang masa. Sa susunod pang mga taon, malaki ang mga tuwiran at di tuwirang tulong nito sa pagbubuo ng mga larangang gerilya at sa armadong pakikibaka.

[creative use of legal activities and organizations. (Legal struggle) became the main conduit for organizing the different sectors in the urban and rural areas located outside the guerilla zones. It became the means by which we were able to raise the level of the open mass movement. In the succeeding years, [legal struggle] also played a big role in the formation of guerilla zones and for advancing the armed struggle.]³⁹⁾

The "white areas" (i. e., town and urban centers) thus had to develop their own dynamics, centered on pursuing a strategy of legal struggle that was no different from regions like Manila were engaged in. Given the limits of the CPP's communications network, it

39) [Mindanao Commission n.d.: 75].

is unlikely that the Mindanao cadres read Hinggil. But circumstantial evidence does point to a possible link between one regional body which was an active proponent of “legal struggle” and what would happen in Mindanao. In 1979, one of Manila’s top cadres, Edgar Jopson, was sent to Mindanao to strengthen the island’s party leadership. Once he settled down, Jopson and his comrades began revising their approach to fit the unique conditions in the country’s largest land frontier.⁴⁰⁾ The result would be another major shift in the CPP’s approach to waging the revolution, with the newly-established Mindanao Commission (Mindacom) pushing for a “politico-military” strategy that placed the urban “legal” struggle on equal standing as the rural armed resistance [Caouette 2004: 328–336].

VI Conclusions

All these are admittedly pieces of the yet-to-be-fully told bigger story of the CPP’s urban struggle. But by looking at fragmentary evidence coming from ranks of activists, and exploring their possible connections to the larger narrative of the CPP’s experience in urban resistance, we can at least discern some of the general contours of that narrative. This “bottom-up” portrait of the CPP’s urban history validates the claims made by Party leaders that student radicals played a major role in the revolution’s recovery after Marcos almost destroyed it in 1972.⁴¹⁾ Yet, the story of Hinggil likewise shows that this radical renaissance was equally problematic for the Party [Escandor 2007]. For early on, how this recovery was supposed to go about turned out to be a problem for cadres and activists who were at the trenches. Since an embattled and harassed leadership, more concerned with setting up guerrilla zones in the countryside, had very little to offer in the concrete, urban cadres — especially those in the schools — had to figure out on their own how to go about the task of rebuilding. The result were documents like Hinggil, which at the onset appeared to look like a set of general steps on how to go about reviving communist cells, but which would turn into the political justifications for a rethinking of long-range urban strategy. Many of these advocates turned out to be the ones who were responsible for the CPP’s remarkable growth under martial law—the result, among other things, of their appreciation of the “theory and practice” of “legal struggle.” But these “deviations” alarmed Party leaders who regarded them as anathema to the Party’s Maoist tenets.

40) On Jopson’s transfer to Mindanao and the impact of his presence, see Pimentel [2006: 147–153].

41) The CPP’s Central Committee boasted: “The student masses and some of their teachers are stirring. Being the most concentrated section of the intelligentsia ... they are steadily manifesting their protest against not only the repressive conditions on campuses but also the rampant evils of the fascist puppet dictatorship in society as a whole. They are an effective link of the urban petty bourgeoisie to the toiling masses.” [Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines 1976 (reproduced 1978): 19].

They could only put a stop to these ideological viruses by eliminating or expelling its most avid advocates.

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